Supreme Court, U.S.
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No. 99-_____

In the Supreme Court of the United States

THE STATE OF TEXAS, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, TEXAS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION,
Cross-Petitioners,
v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA EX REL. JAMES CHURCHILL,
Cross-Respondent,
v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Cross-Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit

CONDITIONAL CROSS-PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTION PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

1. Did Congress intend to include the States within its definition of the word "persons" in the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729 *et seq.* (West Supp. 1998) and, thereby, subject the States to liability for treble damages and civil penalties under the Act?[1]

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[1] This question is presented in *U.S. ex rel. Stevens v. State of Vt. Agency of Natural Resources*, 162 F.3d 195 (2nd Cir. 1998), *petition for cert. granted*, 119 S.Ct. 2391 (June 24, 1999) (No. 98-1828), *argued Nov.29, 1999.* The question is also presented by cross-petition in *U.S. ex rel. Foulds v. Texas Tech Univ.*, 171 F.3d 279 (5th Cir. 1999), *petition for cert. filed, Aug. 23, 1999,* No. 99-321, *petition for cert. filed, Aug. 27, 1999,* No. 99-365, *cross-petition for cert. filed, Aug. 27, 1999,* No. 99-513.

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CITATION TO CASE AS REPORTED BELOW

Neither the opinion of the court of appeals (Petitioner's appendix at App. 1a - App.2a) nor the opinion of the district court (Petitioner's appendix at App. 3a - App.43a) is reported.

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals was entered on August 5. 1999. No petition for rehearing was filed. Churchill filed his Petition for Writ of Certiorari on November 3, 1999; No. 99-779. The United States filed its Petition for Writ of Certiorari on November 2, 1999; No. 99-774. This Court has jurisdiction to review the judgment pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

No. 99-_____

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THE STATE OF TEXAS, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, TEXAS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION,
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CONDITIONAL CROSS-PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

STATUTORY PROVISION INVOLVED

31 U.S.C. § 3729

False claims

(a) Liability for certain acts
Any person who–
(1) knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, to an officer or employee of the United States Government . . . a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval;

> (2) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement to get a false or fraudulent claim paid or approved by the Government;
>
> . . . .
>
> (7) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement to conceal, avoid, or decrease an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to the Government, is liable to the United States Government for a civil penalty of not less than $5,000 and not more than $10,000, plus 3 times the amount of damages which the Government sustains because of the act of that person. . . . A person violating this subsection shall also be liable to the United States Government for the costs of a civil action brought to recover any such penalty or damages.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Relator, James M. Churchill filed this *qui tam* action under seal on June 24, 1997 in the Western District of Texas, Pecos Division. Churchill alleges that defendants, the State of Texas, Texas Department of Human Services, Texas Department of Health and Texas Health and Human Services Commission violated the False Claims Act by submitting false claims to the United States under the Federal Government's Medicaid program. The Medicaid program established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act provides medical assistance to certain low-income individuals and is administered by the states in accordance with federal requirements. The federal government provides approximately 62% of the funding as a match for state dollars. The Texas Department of Health has been responsible for the

indigent health care program, including acute care, in Texas since September 1, 1993. Prior to this, the Texas Department of Human Services managed the program. Defendant Texas Health and Human Services Commission administers federal Medicaid funds paid to the State under 42 U.S.C. § 1396b. Defendant National Heritage Insurance Company processes all claims for Medicaid reimbursement for the Texas Medicaid Program under a contract with the State.

Churchill was a staff attorney employed by the Texas Department of Health ("TDH") from July, 1989 until June, 1997 when he retired. Churchill alleges multiple instances of Medicaid fraud claiming that the defendants failure to effectively pursue reimbursement to Medicaid from third-party private insurers and tortfeasors whose conduct caused injuries to eligible recipients for which treatment was paid by Medicaid funds. 42 U.S.C. §1396a(25) requires State Medicaid agencies to take all reasonable measures to ascertain the legal liability of third parties to pay for care and services furnished to Medicaid recipients and to seek reimbursement from these third parties to the extent that the third party is legally liable for Medicaid services and re-coupment is cost effective. Churchill does not allege that the Defendants failed to pursue subrogation, but rather that they were not diligent enough which, he alleges, resulted in a draw down of additional federal funds from the United States Health Care Financing Administration which he characterizes as false claims.

The False Claims Act creates a scheme by which a plaintiff who alleges independent knowledge of fraud against the federal government may initiate and prosecute a lawsuit using the name of the United States. 31 U.S.C. § 3729-3733 (West Supp. 1997). The suit is originally filed under seal and the federal government, acting through the United States Attorney General, has the opportunity to investigate the allegations and to decide whether or

not to intervene. 31 U.S.C. § 3730 (West Supp. 1997). If the federal government elects not to proceed with the action, the *qui tam* plaintiff has the right to conduct the action on her own behalf and on behalf of the government. 31 U.S.C. § 3730(c)(3) (West Supp. 1997). The original complaint may then be unsealed and the trial court may order that it be served on the named defendant(s). *Id.* § 3730(b)(3). A defendant may be liable for a civil penalty of not less than $5,000 and not more than $10,000 for each false claim, plus three times the amount of damages which the federal government sustains because of the act of that person (or two times the amount of damages in certain instances). *Id.* § 3729(a). The *qui tam* plaintiff is entitled to a share of the proceeds from the action or settlement, which varies from 15 to 30%, and is entitled to reasonable expenses, attorneys fees and costs. *Id.* § 3730(d)(1) and (2). All such expenses, fees and costs are awarded against the defendant. *Id.*

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE CROSS-PETITION

If this Court accepts the Petitions for Certiorari in this case, it is important that it consider the alternative question presented below by state defendants: whether Congress intended in the False Claims Act to extend liability to the states by including them in the term "person" in § 3729(a)(1). On March 29, 1999, the Fifth Circuit panel in its opinion *U.S. ex rel. Foulds v. Texas Tech University,* 171 F.3rd 279 (5th Cir.), *petition for cert. filed* No. 99-321 (relator), *petition for cert. filed* No. 99-365 (United States), decided that the Eleventh Amendment barred a *qui tam* relator's suit against a state when the United States did not intervene and determined, further, that it lacked the subject matter jurisdiction to proceed to decide the statutory question of whether the State is a "person" under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729, *et seq.* (West Supp. 1998) and, thereby, subject to liability for treble

damages and civil penalties under the Act. The Fifth Circuit panel deciding *Churchill* followed the *Foulds* panel decision and did not revisit whether it was appropriate to decide the "persons" issue even though the decision of this Court in *Ruhrgas*, issued after the *Foulds* decision, undermined the reasoning used by the *Foulds* panel to preclude reaching that question. *Marathon Oil Co. v. A.G. Ruhrgas*, 145 F.3d 211, 222-23 (5th Cir. 1998),(en banc), *rev'd* 526 U.S. 574 (1999).

However, because Congress can subject a state to suit in the exercise of its Constitutional authority despite the state's sovereignty, whether Congress intended to create a cause of action against a state by a private party or by the federal government is "a . . . logical prerequisite to the jurisdictional inquiry." *U.S. ex rel. Long v. SCS Business & Technical Institute Inc.*, 173 F.3d 890, 894 (D.C. Cir., 1999) (*Long II*), *petition for cert. filed, Aug. 2, 1999*, No. 99-213. *See Alden v. Maine*, 119 S. Ct. 2240, 2246-2248 (1999).

The Fifth Circuit's decision leaves open two questions which, while "live," implicate important federalism concerns and create uncertainty between the states and the federal government as they share responsibility for the administration of taxpayer programs: first, whether a *qui tam* suit under the FCA is allowed against a state if the United States intervenes at some point in the litigation; second, whether a suit under the FCA for treble damages and civil penalties is allowed against a state if commenced by the United States. The uniqueness of states in relation to other potential defendants who could be sued by the federal government under the FCA makes determining if Congress even intended to create a cause of action against states an inquiry into whether Congress saw the False Claims Act as an appropriate assertion of federal supremacy. If this Court determines that a state is not a "person" for the purpose of liability under the Act, these questions disappear

and the Act becomes a pragmatic exercise of Congressional power to apprehend and punish private persons who defraud the government.[2]

1. The Court Should Resolve The Circuit Conflict Over Whether Congress Intended To Include The States Within Its Definition of "Persons" In The False Claims Act.

Resolution of the "persons" question is necessary because of a conflict in the circuits. The Eighth Circuit and the Second Circuit have found congressional intent to include the states in the definition of "person," and the District of Columbia Circuit has found no support for the inclusion.

The Eighth Circuit declined in *U.S. ex rel. Zissler v. Regents of The University of Minnesota*, 154 F.3d 870 (8th Cir. 1998) to apply the statutory presumption against including sovereigns in the term "person" stating that it applied only to the enacting sovereign and only when the purpose of the statute was in doubt. *Id.* at 874.

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[2] Recent opinions have suggested other constitutional problems with the FCA. "[I]t should be noted that FCA *qui tam* suits stand on shaky constitutional ground with respect to the principle of separation of powers as embodied in Article II's Appointments and Take Care Clauses and Article III." *U.S. ex rel. Stevens v. State of Vt. Agency of Natural Resources*, 162 F.3d 195 (2nd Cir. 1998)(Weinstein, J., dissenting), *petition for cert. granted*, 119 S.Ct. 2391 (June 24, 1999) (No. 98-1828), *argued Nov.29, 1999*. The Fifth Circuit acknowledged these concerns. *Foulds*, 171 F.3d at 292 n. 21.

A split panel of the Fifth Circuit has determined that the False Claims Act violates the Take-Care Clause of the Constitution and the doctrine of separation of powers. One justice concurring would have affirmed the district court finding that a *qui tam* plaintiff lacks standing. *U.S. ex rel. Riley v. St. Luke's Episcopal Hosp.*, 1999 WL 1034213 (5th Cir. Nov. 15, 1999) *en banc reh'g granted; scheduled for argument during the week of January 17, 2000.*

The *Zissler* court perceived the FCA as having a broad remedial purpose which justified placing the burden on the state to show a specific exemption from the reach of the Act. In similar fashion, the Second Circuit found that the FCA did not alter the constitutional balance of federal and state power and refused to apply the "plain statement" rule explained in *U.S. v. Bass*, 404 U.S. 336, 349 (1971). *U.S. ex rel. Stevens v. State of Vt. Agency of Natural Resources*, 162 F.3d 195 (2nd Cir. 1998), *petition for cert. granted*, 119 S.Ct. 2391 (June 24, 1999) (No. 98-1828), *argued Nov. 29, 1999. Stevens* reasoned that the goal of the FCA was to deter and remedy fraud and because "the states have no right or authority, traditional or otherwise, to engage in such conduct," no federalism concerns were implicated. *Id.* at 203. However, the D.C. Circuit accepted that "states are excluded from the term person absent an affirmative contrary showing" and found no textual support or support in the legislative environment or in the legislative history for including states in the term "person" in the FCA. *U.S. ex rel. Long v. SCS Business and Technical Institute, Inc.*, 173 F.3d 870 (D.C. Cir. 1999)(*Long I*), *petition for cert. filed* (Aug.2, 1999)(No. 99-213)

False Claims Act litigation is expensive for states and exposes the state fisc to significant liability. As the *Foulds* court noted, Foulds alleged over 400,000 false claims based on incorrect Medicare and Medicaid billings, each of which could bring fines between $5,000 and $10,000, and the trebling of $20 million in overpayments. 171 F.3d at 282 n.1. If the state is subject to the FCA under the allegations in *Foulds*, it could face between $2 billion and $4 billion in fines and $60 million in damages. Churchill, in this case, alleged that, at minimum, 25% of the 3825 cases handled per month in Texas have potential third-party liability that is allegedly recoverable, and estimated the potential recovery in excess of $100 million per year. Therefore, Churchill hopes to prove over 66,000 false claims based on a failure to

pursue subrogation, each of which could result in a fine of $5,000 or $10,000 and the trebling of $600 million in excessive federal payments. It is not sound public policy to burden blameless taxpayers with huge damage awards for the supposed benefit of the federal government.[3] *See City of Newport v. Fact Concerts, Inc.*, 453 U.S. 247, 263, 266-67 (1981) (recognizing that "[n]either reason nor justice" suggests that retribution in the form of punitive damages should be visited upon blameless and unknowing taxpayers).

The agencies sued by Churchill have been charged with responsibility to administer the federal medicaid programs as part of the "New Federalism" initiative. This relationship should be a cooperative partnership. *New York v. U.S.*, 505 U.S. 144, 167 (1992). However, if the FCA applies to the states, the federal government's continued delegation of responsibility to states to administer federal programs governed by complex federal regulations, under the policy of "New Federalism," exposes states to a broad range of potential liability.[4] If the FCA can be applied to the states, the federal fisc is positioned not only to recoup dollars that were inappropriately paid out, but to collect a windfall from state taxpayers hundreds of times greater than the

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[3] Damages available under the False Claims Act were raised from double damages to treble damages when the Act was amended in 1986. It could be argued that the sole purpose was to make the bounty more attractive to the *qui tam* plaintiff.

[4] *See* Thomas S. Ulen, *Economic & Public Choice Forces in Federalism*, 6 GEO. MASON L. REV. 921 (1998) (discussing the shift of responsibility for administering federal programs to states); *See Stevens* (Weinstein dissenting) 162 F.3d at 225-228 (discussing the damage done by a coercive weapon like the FCA to the cooperative relationship that is necessary for administration by the states of federal programs).

overpayment.[5] "It is reasonable to apply more stringent requirements to debts owed by private persons and to keep the more flexible common law in place for debts owed by state and local governments." *U.S. v. Texas*, 507 U.S. 529, 536 (1993).

Under basic rules of statutory construction, states should not be considered "persons" when that term is used in 31 U.S.C. § 3729(a)(1), the liability-creating section of the FCA. The word "person" is not defined generally in the Act or for purposes of this section and there is no reference to "states" in this section. Section 1 of Title 1 of the United State Code–Rules of Construction dictates that "[when] determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, unless the context indicates otherwise . . . the words 'person' and 'whoever' include corporations, companies, associations, firms, partnerships, societies, and joint stock companies, as well as individuals." Missing from this broad application of the word "person" are states, state entities or other governmental entities.

The statutory language of the False Claims Act only includes the states in its definition of a "person" as it pertains to civil investigative demands under 31 U.S.C. § 3733.[6] Section 3733,

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[5] All federal programs which send money to the states have ample safeguards to require refund of monies if they have been incorrectly applied. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1395(u) and (hh); *U.S. v. Texas*, 507 U.S. 529 (1993); *Bennett v. Kentucky Dept. of Educ.*, 470 U.S. 656, 662 (1985); *Bell v. New Jersey*, 461 U.S. 773, 790 (1983);*Mount Sinai Hospital of Greater Miami, Inc. v. Weinberger*, 517 F.2d 329 (5th Cir. 1975), *opinion modified*, 522 F.2d 179 (5th Cir. 1975), *cert. denied*, 425 U.S. 935 (1976).

[6]Because states are frequently partners in the disbursement of federal funds under New Federalism, it is not surprising that Congress saw fit to provide that the Department of Justice could confidentially get information from them

added in 1986, plainly states that the definitions contained there apply "[f]or purposes of this section." *See* § 3733(1).[7] The fact that "person" is defined as including a state entity for "purposes of this section [§ 3733]" argues against congressional intent to include the states within the scope of "person" in the liability-creating sections of the Act. 31 U.S.C. § 3733(l)(4). "[W]here Congress include[s] particular language in one section of a statute but omits it in another section of the same Act, it is generally presumed that Congress acts intentionally and purposely in the disparate inclusion or exclusion." *Gozlon-Peretz v. U.S.*, 498 U.S. 395, 404 (1991)(citations omitted).

The Court in 1979 noted that "in common usage, the term 'person' does not include the sovereign, [and] statutes employing the [word] are ordinarily construed to exclude it." It observed that this was "[p]articularly. . . true where the statute imposes a burden or limitation, as distinguished from conferring a benefit or advantage."[8] *Wilson v. Omaha Indian Tribe*, 442 U.S. 653, 667

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without court involvement or complaints about the cost during the process of deciding whether grounds exist for initiating false claim actions against private contractors.

[7] When Congress added § 3733 to the FCA it borrowed the provision from the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvement Act of 1976. The legislative history for the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act explains that the civil investigative demand provisions of that Act are intended to reach "'target and non-target' third parties with relevant information." H. R. REP. No. 94-1343 (1976).

[8] Relying on *U.S. v. Cooper Corp.*, 312 U.S. 600, 604 (1941), *Wilson* went on to note that there was "no hard and fast rule of exclusion, and much depends on the context, the subject matter, legislative history, and executive interpretation." *Wilson*, 442 U.S. at 667. However, in *International Primate Protection League v. Admin. of Tulane Educational Fund*, 500 U. S. 72, 83

(1979), *cert. denied* 449 U.S. 825, 101 S.Ct. 87 (1980) (internal quotes and citations omitted) (construing a statute which prevented and provided remedies against non-Indian squatters on Indian lands). The Court repeated the rule that in ordinary usage the term "person" does not include states in *Will v. Michigan Dept. of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58 (1989). *Will* also noted that the Congress of 1863, when the False Claims Act was originally enacted, would not have assumed that "person" included states. *Will*, 491 U.S. at 68 nn. 8 & 9.

The False Claims Act was intended "to stop the massive frauds by large contractors, during the Civil War." *U.S. v. Bornstein*, 423 U.S. 303, 309 (1976). As originally enacted, it mandated imprisonment, a remedy which could not apply to a state. Act of March 2, 1863, ch. 67 § 3, 12 Stat. 698. The word "person" in the section creating civil liability in the Act has not been amended since it was originally enacted in 1863.

Nor does the legislative history of the Act suggest congressional intent to subject states to suit. This is highlighted by the sponsor of the Act, Senator Howard, who said the purpose of the Act was to

> hold out to a confederate a strong temptation to betray his coconspirator, and bring him to justice. . . . I have based the [provisions] upon the old-fashioned idea of holding out a temptation, and "setting a rogue to catch a rogue" which is the safest

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(1991), the Court put *Cooper* in context by characterizing the rule that the word "person" does not include the sovereign as a presumption that must be overcome.

> and most expeditious way I have ever discovered of bringing rogues to justice.

Cong. Globe, 37th Cong., 3d Sess. 955-56 (1863) (cited in *Foulds*, 171 F.3d at 293). The House Select Committee, which investigated Civil War fraud prior to the passage of the FCA, issued a report in December of 1861 that discussed allegations of "personal aggrandizement" on the part of state officials in Indiana, Ohio, New York and Illinois. The discussion of the problem does not reveal any intent to subject the states to liability for fraud but, instead, shows that states were thought of as partners in "demand[ing] the highest integrity of those invested with public trusts, and each [the states and the federal government] should hold their agents, by rigid scrutiny, to severe accountability." H.R. REP. No. 2, part 2 (1862).

The False Claims Act was amended in 1986 and the definition of "person" was not changed to include states. Pub. L. 99-562 § 3, Oct. 27, 1986, 100 Stat. 3153. The amendments to the FCA were passed by the same Congress that passed the Program Fraud Civil Penalties Act (PFCPA), 31 U.S.C. § 380, *et seq.* and the Anti-Kickback Act of 1986, 42 U.S.C. § 52(3). These Acts create liability for similar conduct. The PFCPA and the Anti-Kickback Act define "person" and their definitions also do not include states. In fact, in each of these Acts, the word "organization" is clarified by the word "private." The traditional statutory construction principle of *in pari materia* establishes that the use of a word in one statute which is *in pari materia* with another statute is persuasive of its meaning in the other. *U.S. v. Rodriguez*, 60 F.3d 193, 196 (5th Cir. 1995), *cert. denied*, 516 U.S. 1000 (1995). When Congress uses the same forms of statutory language in different statutes having the same general purpose, courts presume that Congress intended the same interpretation to apply in each

instance. *Northcross v. Bd. of Educ. of Memphis City Schools*, 412 U.S. 427, 428 (1973).

The only legislative history supporting the inclusion of states as defendants in the FCA is not deserving of any weight. *Long I*, 173 F.3d at 878. The Senate Report that accompanied the 1986 amendments noted that the False Claims Act "reaches all parties who may submit false claims. The term 'person' is used in its broad sense to include partnerships, associations, and corporations . . . as well as states and political subdivisions." S. REP. No. 99-345, at 8 (internal citations omitted). This statement is not entitled to any weight because it does not describe the 1986 amendments but is part of the "history of the False Claims Act and Court Interpretation" section which was a repeat of a background discussion contained in an earlier Senate Report which had accompanied a failed effort to amend the False Claims Act in 1979-80. Compare S. REP. No. 99-345 at 8-10 with S. REP. No. 96-657 at 2-4. At the time the statement was written, it was incorrect because there was no legislative evidence or case on point indicating that "person" in the False Claims Act included the states. The one court that had addressed the issue in a case, which admittedly has no precedential value, held that states were not "persons" under the Act. *U.S. ex rel. Weinberger v. State of Fla.*, 615 F. 2d 1370 (5th Cir. 1980); *see Long I*, 173 F.3d at 879. The language from S. REP. No. 99-345 was irrelevant to the proposed amendments, and the report's "section-by-section" analysis did not describe the liability provision of the Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729, as subjecting the states to any liability, even though that section was amended to increase the double damage provision to a treble damage provision and to enhance the civil penalties.

If there is no ambiguity when a statute is read in its natural way, the inquiry should end. *Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 842-43 (1984).

See also Mississippi Poultry Ass'n., Inc. v. Madigan, 31 F.3d 293, 299 (5th Cir. 1994). A plain reading of 31 U.S.C. § 3729(a)(1), the liability creating section of the FCA, does not indicate that states are subject to liability. Even if the Court considers the *Cooper* factors (purpose of the statute, subject matter, context, legislative history and executive interpretation), it should conclude that states were not intended as defendants in the FCA. *See U.S. v. Cooper Corp.*, 312 U.S. 600, 605 (1941).

However, if the Court determines that the statute is ambiguous, the rule of *Hilton v. South Carolina Public Railways Comm'n.*, 502 U.S. 197, 206 (1991), instructs that "a plain statement" rule should be used to interpret federal statutes which, if applied to states, could subject them to monetary liability.[9] Thus, absent a clear statement that a statute applies to the states, a court should find that the statute does not apply. As observed in *Will*, when Congress "intends to alter the 'usual constitutional balance between the States and the Federal Government,' it must make its intention to do so unmistakably clear in the language of the statute." *Will*, 491 U.S. at 65. *Will* explicitly notes that this rule cannot be limited to Eleventh Amendment cases. *Id. Gregory v. Ashcroft*, which is not an Eleventh Amendment case, relies on the same line of cases relied on by *Will* for the proposition that the "plain statement rule is nothing more than an acknowledgment that the states retain substantial sovereign powers under our

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[9] *Hilton* did not apply the "plain statement" rule because of *stare decisis* and the reliance that had been placed on a previous construction of the Federal Employers' Liability Act (FELA). However, in resting on stare decisis, *Hilton* acknowledged that in most cases *Will* and *Gregory v. Ashcroft*, 501 U.S. 452 (1991), should be followed. *Hilton*, 502 U.S. at 566. Additionally, *Hilton* relied on *Parden v. Terminal Ry. of Alabama State Docks Dept.*, 377 U.S. 184 (1964), which has been overruled. *See College Sav. Bank v. Florida Prepaid Post Secondary Educ. Expense Bd.*, 119 S. Ct. 2219 (1999).

constitutional scheme, powers with which Congress does not readily interfere." *Gregory v. Ashcroft*, 501 U.S. 452, 461. The requirement of a clear statement exists even when the suit is brought by the federal government.[10] Citing *Pennhurst*,[11] *Will* noted that Congress should make its intention clear if it intends to impose a condition on the grant of federal moneys. *Will*, 491 U.S. at 65. The general rule is stated in *U.S. v. Bass*, 404 U.S. 336, 349 (1971), also cited in *Will*,

> [in] traditionally sensitive areas, such as legislation affecting the federal balance, the requirement of a clear statement assures that the legislature has in fact faced, and intended to bring into issue, the critical matters involved in the judicial decision.

Id. Far from a "clear statement, as the Fifth Circuit observed, "no relevant provision of the Act explicitly mentions states as defendants." *Foulds*, 171 F.3d at 294.

If Congress intends to treat states as if they could be guilty of fraud against the federal government, and if it intends to subject the states' treasuries to the treble damages and civil penalties of a statute like the FCA, it should be obligated by federalism concerns

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[10] The "real party in interest" analysis applied by the Eighth Circuit is irrelevant to determining Congressional intent to include states as parties subject to liability in drafting the False Claims Act. *Zissler*, 154 F. 3d at 872. For purposes of determining whether applying the FCA to the states affects the federal-state balance, Texas maintains that the treble damages and civil penalties are enough of an intrusion on federal-state relations to require applicability of the "clear statement" rule.

[11] *Pennhurst State School and Hosp. v. Halderman*, 451 U.S. 1, 16 (1981).

to state its intention clearly. If the rule established by *Wilson* and *Will* has any meaning at all, it must create at minimum a default rule; states are excluded from the term "person" absent an affirmative contrary showing. *Long I*, 173 F.3d at 874.

CONCLUSION

Cross-Petitioners respectfully request, if the Court grants Churchill's petition, No. 99-779 or the United States' petition, No. 99-774, that it also grant this cross-petition and affirm the judgment of the Fifth Circuit in finding the False Claims Act *qui tam* provisions unconstitutional under the Eleventh Amendment or affirm the Fifth Circuit's dismissal of Churchill's suit by finding that the states were not persons for liability purposes under the False Claims Act.

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Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
JAN 5 2000
CLERK

(2)

No. 99-956

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

THE STATE OF TEXAS, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, and TEXAS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION,

Cross-Petitioners,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA *ex rel.* JAMES M. CHURCHILL,

Cross-Respondent.

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION TO CONDITIONAL CROSS-PETITION

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QUESTION PRESENTED

The question presented by this cross-petition is also presented in No. 98-1828, *State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources v. United States ex rel. Stevens*, argued before this Court on November 29, 1999, and is as follows:

> Whether a State is a "person" subject to suit under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729 *et seq.*

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDING

The parties in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit were the United States of America (which intervened in the appeal), *qui tam* plaintiff James M. Churchill, and defendants the State of Texas, the Texas Department of Human Services, the Texas Department of Health, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

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The United States *ex rel.* James Churchill opposes the Conditional Cross-Petition for Writ of Certiorari filed by The State of Texas, Texas Department of Health, and Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

OPINIONS BELOW

Neither the opinion of the court of appeals (Petitioner's appendix at App. 1a – App. 2a) nor the opinion of the district court (Petitioner's appendix at App. 3a – App. 43a) is reported.

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

Although the court of appeals had jurisdiction over the Eleventh Amendment question presented by cross-respondent's petition, it did not have jurisdiction to resolve the statutory question presented by this cross-petition. *See Swint v. Chambers County Comm'n*, 514 U.S. 35, 49-50 (1995). Cross-petitioners brought their interlocutory appeal from the district court's denial of their motion to dismiss. The statutory issue is not independently appealable, was not certified by the district court, and is not "inextricably intertwined" with the Eleventh Amendment issue that is the subject of this interlocutory appeal. Accordingly, the statutory challenge was not properly before the court of appeals and should not be addressed by this Court.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The relevant portions of the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733, are reproduced in the Petitioner's appendix at App. 44a – App. 61a.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

1. Originally enacted in 1863, the False Claims Act ("FCA"), now codified at 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733, is the federal Government's "primary litigative tool for combating fraud" committed by all "unscrupulous contractors and grantees." S. Rep. No. 345, 99th Cong., 2d Sess. 8 (1986), *reprinted in*, 1986 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5266, 5273. Under the Act, any person who knowingly presents or causes to be presented a false or fraudulent claim to the United States for payment or approval is liable to the Government for three times the amount of damages the Government sustains because of that person's act plus penalties for each false claim submitted.

In 1986, Congress substantially amended the FCA and, in particular, its *qui tam* provisions. Section 3730(b) allows any person to bring an FCA suit in the name of the Government to recover damages suffered by the United States and to share in any recovery obtained as a result of the suit. The *qui tam* plaintiff, known as a relator, initiates a suit by filing a complaint under seal in a United States District Court. Simultaneously, the relator must serve a copy of the complaint on the federal Government together with a written disclosure describing all information and evidence in the relator's possession relating to the case. 31 U.S.C. § 3730(b)(2).

The United States then has at least 60 days to investigate the relator's allegations and determine whether to intervene and proceed with the action. *Id.* § 3730(b)(3). If the United States intervenes, the action is formally conducted by the Government. *Id.* § 3730(b)(4)(A). If the Government chooses not to officially intervene, the relator has the right to proceed

with the action in the Government's name. In either event, the Government retains the right not only to recoup the lion's share of any recovery, but also to force dismissal of the action or impede any proposed compromise of the claim. *See id.* §§ 3730(c)(2) and (3).

2. Realtor James M. Churchill filed this *qui tam* action under seal on June 24, 1997, in the Western District of Texas, Pecos Division. Churchill alleged that defendants the State of Texas, Texas Department of Human Services, Texas Department of Health and Texas Health and Services Commission (hereinafter collectively "the State defendants") violated the FCA by submitting false claims to the United States under the federal Government's Medicaid program (referred to as "Medicaid").

The Medicaid program is highly regulated. Among the regulations to which state Medicaid programs are subject are those requiring states to identify and pursue collection from any third party who might be liable to pay for the care and services provided or available under the program. Monies collected from responsible third parties must be used to reimburse, first the federal Government, and then the State, for amounts expended for medical care under the Medicaid program. By regulation, federal financial participation, which exceeds sixty percent of the total Medicaid expenditures in Texas, is unavailable if a State fails to follow the regulations governing recovery of Medicaid funds from third-party sources.[1] Specifically, relator alleged that in violation of applicable laws and regulations, defendants knowingly submitted claims for federal financial participation despite

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1. *See* 42 C.F.R. § 433.140 (1997).

having failed to comply with the regulatory requirements governing third-party tort liability.[2]

3. Pursuant to the United States' *ex parte* application for an extension of time to determine whether to intervene, the District Court extended the 60-day seal period to March 15, 1998. On March 16, 1998, after noting that the Government had not sought a further extension, the District Court ordered the clerk to unseal Churchill's complaint. The State defendants were then served. The State defendants moved to dismiss contending, first, that the State is not a "person" under the FCA, and second, that the Eleventh Amendment bars the suit. Churchill responded, as did the United States, which sought and obtained leave to file a brief in opposition to the State defendants' motion to dismiss.

4. In an order filed June 4, 1998, the District Court denied the State defendants' motion on both grounds. (Petitioner's appendix at App. 42a – App. 43a). The State defendants timely appealed. The District Court has stayed most of the proceedings below during the pendency of the appeal.

5. On October 21, 1998, the Fifth Circuit granted the United States' motion to intervene as a matter of right under 28 U.S.C. § 2403 as a plaintiff-appellant in the appeal so that it could defend the constitutionality of the *qui tam*

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2. Relator also sued National Heritage Insurance Company ("NHIC"), with which the Texas Department of Human Services (and later the Texas Department of Health) contracted to provide various services, including investigating, identifying and pursuing all third-party liability sources. Relator alleged, *inter alia*, that NHIC caused the submission of false claims by failing to pursue reimbursement from liable third-party tort-feasors.

provisions of the False Claims Act as they applied to State defendants.

6. On March 29, 1999, a Fifth Circuit panel issued its opinion in *United States ex rel. Foulds v. Texas Tech University*, 171 F.3d 279 (5th Cir.), *petition for cert. filed*, No. 99-513 (Aug. 27, 1999), a case presenting the same issues as the instant one. The Court in *Foulds* reversed the district court's denial of the State's motion to dismiss, holding that "when the United States has not actively intervened in the action, the Eleventh Amendment bars qui tam plaintiffs from instituting suits against the sovereign states in federal court." *Id.* at 294. Because the Fifth Circuit determined that the Eleventh Amendment presented a "threshold jurisdictional issue," it did not address the statutory question also presented — whether the State is a "person" under the FCA. *Id.* at 288, 294.

7. On August 5, 1999, another panel of the Fifth Circuit issued a three-paragraph unpublished opinion in the instant case, reversing the District Court's denial of the State defendants' motion to dismiss and remanding for entry of a judgment dismissing the claims against the State defendants. The panel's decision was based upon its determination that it was bound by the prior decision in *Foulds*, which it described as holding that the Eleventh Amendment bars qui tam suits against States in federal court when the United States has not actively intervened. (Petitioner's appendix at App. 2a).

REASONS FOR DENYING THE CROSS-PETITION

As explained further below, the court of appeals did not have jurisdiction to decide the statutory issue presented by

this cross-petition. Accordingly, the issue is not before the Court, and the conditional cross-petition should be denied.

Alternatively, the conditional cross-petition should be held pending the decision in *State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources v. United States ex rel. Stevens*, No. 98-1828 (certiorari granted June 24, 1999 and argued Nov. 29, 1999). The conditional cross-petition here concerns whether a State is a "person under the FCA, an issue raised squarely in *Stevens*. The Court's resolution of *Stevens* will govern disposition of this case.

I. BECAUSE THE COURT OF APPEALS LACKED JURISDICTION OVER THE STATUTORY QUESTION PRESENTED, THIS COURT MAY NOT CONSIDER THEM.

The court of appeals in *Foulds*, the decision upon which the court of appeals relied in the instant case, did not address the statutory arguments made here, because it viewed the Eleventh Amendment issue as a jurisdictional question that must be determined first. *Foulds*, 171 F.3d at 285. Having found the suit in *Foulds* barred by the Eleventh Amendment, the statutory question was not reached. *Id.* at 288 ("if the Eleventh Amendment removes our jurisdictional authority to hear Fould's case, we have no power to determine whether . . . states are "person[s] under the Act."). Even if the court of appeals had decided the Eleventh Amendment question differently in *Foulds*, however, it would not have had jurisdiction over the statutory question in that case or the instant one.

The court of appeals in *Foulds* and in this case had jurisdiction to hear the State defendants' interlocutory appeal

from the district court's denial of their claims of Eleventh Amendment immunity under the collateral order doctrine, as adopted in *Cohen v. Beneficial Indus. Loan Corp.*, 337 U.S. 541 (1949) and applied in *Puerto Rico Aqueduct & Sewer Authority v. Metcalf & Eddy, Inc.*, 506 U.S. 139 (1993). In *Cohen*, the Court recognized a narrow exception to the final judgment rule, holding that an appeal could be taken from an interlocutory order that finally determines "claims of right separable from, and collateral to, rights asserted in the action." *Cohen*, 337 U.S. at 546. In *Puerto Rico Aqueduct*, the Court held that the *Cohen* exception applied to a district court order denying an Eleventh Amendment immunity claim, reasoning that the immunity from suit conferred by the Eleventh Amendment "is effectively lost if a case is erroneously permitted to go to trial." *See id.* 506 U.S. at 144, 147.

The rule announced in *Cohen* and applied in *Puerto Rico Aqueduct*, however, does not provide a basis for jurisdiction over the district court's determination that States are "person[s]" within the meaning of the FCA. Courts of appeals do not have discretion "to append to a *Cohen*-authorized appeal from a collateral order further rulings of a kind neither independently appealable nor certified by the district court." *Swint v. Chambers County Commission*, 514 U.S. 35, 47 (1995).[3] Consequently, orders denying defenses to liability, rather than immunity from suit, do not fall within the *Cohen* rule. *Id.* at 43.

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3. The Court viewed pendant jurisdiction as undermining the two-tiered arrangement mandated by 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). 514 U.S. at 47. The Court further reasoned that "a rule loosely allowing pendant appellate jurisdiction would encourage parties to parlay *Cohen*-type collateral orders into multi-issue interlocutory appeal tickets." *Id.* at 49-50.

The State defendants' claim that they are not "person[s]" who can be subject to FCA liability is not a claim of immunity from suit, but rather, is simply an ostensible defense to liability that is easily and effectively reviewable after final judgment. Although *Swint* left open the possibility that courts of appeals might have jurisdiction to review an otherwise non-appealable ruling that is "inextricably intertwined" with an appealable interlocutory order or that must be decided to ensure "meaningful review" of the appealable issue, neither circumstance is present here.

The question of Eleventh Amendment immunity is not "inextricably intertwined" with the statutory question presented in the conditional cross-petition, because a court of appeals could fully determine the appealable constitutional issue on the assumption that States are "persons" under the FCA. In the past, this Court has done precisely that. *See Will v. Michigan Dep't. State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 63 n.4 (1989) (noting "a number of cases" that addressed the issue of a State's Eleventh Amendment immunity without addressing the meaning of "person" in 42 U.S.C. § 1983, because resolution of that issue was unnecessary to the decision in those cases). Moreover, the Eleventh Amendment question is much narrower than the statutory question. Adopting the State's construction of the term "person" under the FCA would preclude even suits brought by the Attorney General, against whom the Eleventh Amendment immunity claim justifying the State defendant's interlocutory appeal could not have even been made.

Nor is it necessary to determine the statutory question in order to ensure "meaningful review" of the Eleventh Amendment issue. In sum, *Swint* precluded the court of

appeals here from addressing the "person" issue and should preclude the Court from addressing it here.[4]

II. EVEN ABSENT THE JURISDICTIONAL IMPEDIMENT, THE CONDITIONAL CROSS-PETITION SHOULD BE DENIED, OR IN THE ALTERNATIVE, HELD PENDING THE OUTCOME OF *STEVENS*.

Even if this Court were to determine that it could consider the statutory question posed by the State defendants, it should nonetheless deny the cross-petition. The State defendants' arguments are based upon their erroneous contention that *Will v. Michigan Dep't. of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58 (1989) commands that "the plain meaning" of the word person "excludes" States unless Congress has made a

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4. Shortly after the Fifth Circuit decided *Foulds*, the District of Columbia Circuit issued its opinion in *United States ex rel. Long v. SCS Bus. & Tech. Inst., Inc.*, 173 F.3d 870 (D.C. Cir.), *supplemented*, 173 F.3d 890 (D.C. Cir. 1999), *petition for certiorari filed* August 2, 1999 (No. 99-213). The *Long* court disagreed with the Fifth Circuit's reasoning regarding the order in which the questions presented should be decided, holding that the statutory question should be addressed first because that approach had "the significant virtue of avoiding a difficult constitutional question." *Id.* 173 F.3d at 898. With due respect to the District of Columbia Circuit, it would be anomalous indeed to address a question not before the court in order to avoid deciding the only question over which the court has jurisdiction. Moreover, the cases upon which the District of Columbia Circuit relied to support its analysis were not cases involving questions appealable only under the collateral order doctrine; rather in those cases, the Court was choosing the order of decision with respect to questions that were each clearly appealable, either under the final judgment rule or a statute allowing interlocutory appeal.

"plain statement" referring to them by name. The State defendants misread *Will* and are wrong in assuming that any "plain statement" canon applies to this case.

1. Two and a half years after deciding *Will*, this Court rejected the contention that *Will* adopted "a *per se* rule prohibiting the interpretation of general liability language to include the states, absent a clear statement by Congress to the effect that Congress intends to subject the states to the cause of action." *Hilton v. South Carolina Public Railways Comm'n.*, 502 U.S. 197, 205 (1991). Indeed, this Court has repeatedly held that " 'there is no hard and fast rule of exclusion' of the sovereign." *International Primate Protection League v. Administrators of Tulane Educational Fund*, 500 U.S. 72, 83 (1991). (Quoting *United States v. Coopen Corp.*, 312 U.S. 600, 604-05 (1941)). Accordingly, this Court has construed the term "person" to reach the States, especially when, as here, the purpose of the act in question "is as capable of being obstructed by state as by individual action." *United States v. California*, 297 U.S. 175, 186 (1936); *see also Jefferson County Pharm. Ass'n. v. Abbott Labs.*, 460 U.S. 150, 154-55 & nn.10 & 11 (1983) (noting that the statutory language at issue was sufficiently broad to cover governmental bodies); *Helvering v. Stockholms Enskilda Bank*, 293 U.S. 84, 91-92 (1934) (noting that "many times [it] has been held that . . . a state is a 'person' within the meaning of statutory provisions applying only to persons" and citing cases); *Ohio v. Helvering*, 292 U.S. 360, 371 (1934) (rejecting contention that state is not embraced within the meaning of the word "person" in statutory provision that imposes a tax upon every "person who sells" liquor).

In sum, the "plain statement" rule discussed in *Will* and clarified in *Hilton* is "an 'ordinary rule of statutory

construction,' " *Hilton*, 502 U.S. at 205 (quoting *Will*, 491 U.S. at 65), that comes into play only at the end of the statutory construction process and only then if it has been determined that the statute at issue is ambiguous. *See Salinas v. United States*, 522 U.S. 52, 60 (1997) ("The rules of statutory construction we have followed to give proper respect to the federal-state balance . . . d[o] not apply when a statute [is] unambiguous.").

2. The State defendants' argument is further flawed because it ignores the fact that the FCA makes "any person" liable to the United States for fraud perpetrated against the federal government. The State defendants are unable to cite any cases from this Court that apply the plain statement rule to a federal statute creating a right of action in favor of the United States. Indeed, the Court has rejected the notion that "stringent interpretative principle[s]" apply to the construction of statutes authorizing suits by the federal government against the states. *Pennsylvania v. Union Gas Co.*, 491 U.S. 1, 11 (1989).[5]

3. In sum, if "[t]he purpose, the subject matter, the context, the legislative history, [or] the executive interpretation of the statute . . . indicate an intent, by use of the term, to bring state or nation within the scope of the law," then the term "person" will be construed to include States and other sovereigns. *International Primate Protection League*, 500 U.S. at 83; *see also Sims v. United States*, 359 U.S. 108, 112 (1959) ("Whether the term 'person' used in a federal statute includes a State cannot be abstractly declared,

5. This Court's subsequent repudiation in *Seminole Tribe v. Florida*, 517 U.S. 44 (1996), of the Eleventh Amendment holding in *Union Gas* left intact the statutory analysis adopted by a clear majority of the *Union Gas* Court.

but depends upon its legislative environment. . . ."). Applying this standard to the FCA leads to the inescapable conclusion that the State defendants' arguments are misdirected.

This Court has interpreted the original FCA as "intended to reach all types of fraud, without qualification, that might result in financial loss to the Government." *United States v. Neifert-White Co.*, 390 U.S. 228, 232 (1968); *see also United States el rel. Marcus v. Hess*, 317 U.S. 537, 544 (1943) (object of original FCA "was to provide protection against those who would 'cheat the United States.' "). The wide range of conduct prohibited by the original Act, as well as the Act as amended in 1986, supports the above interpretation. *See* 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733; the False Claims Act (original), Act of March 2, 1863, Ch. 67, 12 Stat. 696 (1863).

In 1986, Congress repealed the entire paragraph that formerly defined the scope of the Act to "[a] person not a member of an armed force of the United States", replacing it with language applying the Act's proscription broadly to "[a]ny person." *See* False Claim Amendments Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99-562, 100 Stat. 3153, 3153. The 1986 amendments made other changes to the FCA that unambiguously establish Congressional intent to subject the States to suit. That intent is further expressed in the relevant committee report explaining that "[t]he term 'person' is used in its broad sense to include . . . states and political subdivisions thereof." S. Rep. 345, 99th Cong., 2d Sess. 8, *reprinted in* 1986 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5266, 5273. The State defendants' attempt to denigrate this clear expression of Congressional understanding should be rejected.

The State defendants' reliance on the CID provisions of the FCA is also misplaced. In Section 3733(l)(4), the term "person" is defined to mean "any natural person, partnership, corporation, association, or other legal entity, including any State or political subdivision of a State." The State defendants argue that the inclusion of States in the definition of "person" applicable to Section 3733 means that States are not included within the definition of "person" elsewhere in the FCA. The problem with the State defendants' argument is that it necessarily means that the other categories of entities included in Section 3733(l)(4) would also have to be excluded from the definition of "person" in the liability section of the FCA. Since the definition of "person" in Section 3733(l)(4) is so all inclusive, adopting the State defendants' Section 3733 argument would lead to the absurd conclusion that the FCA would not apply to natural persons, partnerships, corporations, or associations, all of whom the FCA unquestionably reaches.

CONCLUSION

The conditional cross-petition for certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,

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January 5, 2000

Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
FEB 1 2000
CLERK

No. 99-956

In the Supreme Court of the United States

STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL., PETITIONERS

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ET AL.

ON CONDITIONAL CROSS-PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES

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5 pp

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether a State or state agency is a "person" subject to potential liability under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. 3729 *et seq.*

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES

OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the court of appeals (99-774 Pet. App. 1a-2a)* is not reported. The opinion of the district court (99-774 Pet. App. 3a-41a) is not reported.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals was entered on August 5, 1999. Petitions for a writ of certiorari were filed on November 2, 1999 (No. 99-774) and November 3, 1999 (No. 99-779). The conditional cross-petition for a

* References to "99-774 Pet. App." are to the appendix to the petition for a writ of certiorari in *United States* v. *Texas*, No. 99-774.

writ of certiorari was filed on December 2, 1999. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1254(1).

STATEMENT

1. The False Claims Act (FCA), 31 U.S.C. 3729 *et seq.*, prohibits a variety of deceptive practices involving government funds and property. 31 U.S.C. 3729(a)(1)-(7). A "person" who violates the FCA "is liable to the United States Government for a civil penalty of not less than $5,000 and not more than $10,000, plus 3 times the amount of damages which the Government sustains." 31 U.S.C. 3729(a). Suits to collect the statutory penalties may be brought either by the Attorney General, or by a private person (known as a relator) in the name of the United States, in an action commonly referred to as a *qui tam* action. See 31 U.S.C. 3730(a) and (b)(1); 99-774 Pet. 3.

2. The instant case involves a *qui tam* action filed by James M. Churchill. The defendants included the State of Texas and three state agencies. Those state entities are the cross-petitioners in this Court. The district court denied the state defendants' motion to dismiss the *qui tam* claims against them. 99-774 Pet. App. 3a-41a. The court of appeals reversed, holding that the suit was barred by the Eleventh Amendment. *Id.* at 1a-2a; see 99-774 Pet. 5.

3. The United States and the relator each filed a petition for a writ of certiorari. See *United States* v. *Texas*, No. 99-774; *United States ex rel. Churchill* v. *Texas*, No. 99-779. Those petitions present the question whether the Eleventh Amendment bars a *qui tam* suit against a State or state agency. The petitions are currently pending before this Court.

DISCUSSION

The conditional cross-petition for a writ of certiorari argues (at 16) that, if this Court grants certiorari in No. 99-774 and/or No. 99-779, it should also consider the question whether a State or a state agency is a "person" subject to potential liability under 31 U.S.C. 3729(a). On November 29, 1999, this Court heard oral argument in *Vermont Agency of Natural Resources* v. *United States ex rel. Stevens*, No. 98-1828. That case presents the same question of statutory interpretation that is presented in the conditional cross-petition here, as well as the same Eleventh Amendment question that is presented in Nos. 99-774 and 99-779. See 98-1828 Pet. at i. The conditional cross-petition for a writ of certiorari should therefore be held pending this Court's decision in *Vermont Agency of Natural Resources* and then disposed of as appropriate.

CONCLUSION

The conditional cross-petition for a writ of certiorari should be held pending this Court's decision in *Vermont Agency of Natural Resources* v. *United States ex rel. Stevens*, No. 98-1828 (argued Nov. 29, 1999), and disposed of as appropriate in light of the resolution of that case.

Respectfully submitted.

SETH P. WAXMAN
Solicitor General

FEBRUARY 2000